

HABS No. WV-113

Federal Reformatory for Women
1 mile west of State Route 3 near
bridge over Greenbrier River
Alderson vicinity
Summers County
West Virginia

HABS
WVA,
45-ALD.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
WVA
45-ALD.V,
1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FEDERAL REFORMATORY FOR WOMEN

HABS No. WV-113

Location: 1 mile west of State Route 3 near bridge over
Greenbrier River, Alderson vicinity, Summers County,
West Virginia
Present Owner: Department of Justice, United States
Government
Present Occupants: Warden, staff, and inmates
Present Use: Federal reformatory for women

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

The following information is taken from Thomas W. Dixon, Jr., The Rise and Fall of Alderson, West Virginia, McClain Printing Co., (n.d.), Chapter XX, pp. 319-323.

In the early 1920's a number of women's organizations began to agitate for reform of the treatment of women by the Federal penal system. Largely due to the appointment of Mrs. Mabel Willebrandt as the first woman Assistant Attorney General, an Enabling Act for a new reformed prison for women was passed in June, 1924.

The recommendations of the Enabling Act were sevenfold. The new institution was to be a prison for women only with a capacity of 700, located near the geographic center of the prison population. To be named the Federal Industrial Institution for Women, the new prison was to be built on the "cottage plan" (campus style) and was to have a woman as warden.

And the chief purposes of this institution, once it had been built, were to be "reform, not punishment, rehabilitation, training and education."

Alderson, West Virginia, was chosen as the site for the prison on January 25, 1925, because it met all the necessary qualifications. It was close to Washington, it had a good climate and water supply, there was plenty of good land for buildings and for agriculture, and it was close to the railroad.

The designers of the complex were government architects

from the Treasury and Agriculture Departments, according to Mr. K. D. Swope of Lewisburg who was interviewed on October 31, 1974. Mr. Swope recalls that Louis Simon was the architect from the Department of Agriculture.

The complex was constructed by the Virginia Engineering Company, Newport News, Virginia, and was formally opened on Saturday, November 24, 1928.

B. Bibliography:

1. Bryan, Helen. Inside. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953.
2. Dixon, Thomas W., Jr. The Rise and Fall of Alderson, West Virginia. Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Printing Co., n.d.
3. Flynn, Elizabeth Gurley. The Alderson Story. New York: International Publishers, 1963.
4. Giallombardo, Rose. Society of Women, A Study of a Women's Prison. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 195 .
5. Harris, Dr. Mary B. I Knew Them in Prison. New York: Viking Press, 1936.

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